

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancies in the United States have declined in recent years but they remain an endemic public health problem. Young women of color and young women of low income are disproportionately affected by teenage childbearing.

PREGNANCY RATES

- Teen pregnancy rates are much higher in the United States than in many other developed countries—twice as high as in England, Wales or Canada, and nine times as high as in the Netherlands or Japan.¹
- One in every 15 men fathers a child while he is a teenager.²
- The 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance reported that, nationwide, 6.9 percent of students reported that they had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.³
- Half of all initial adolescent pregnancies occur within the first six months following first intercourse, and 20 percent occur within the first month.⁴
- Estimates available for the early 1990s suggest that the pregnancy rate peaked in 1990 and 1991 at 115 pregnancies per 1,000 females 15 to 19 years old.⁵
- In 1992, 112 pregnancies occurred per 1,000 U.S. women 15 to 19 years old. Of these, 61 ended in births 36 in abortions, and 15 in miscarriages.⁶
- One in five African-American teenagers and one in six Latina teenagers become pregnant each year.⁷
- There is a direct relation between poverty level, education of parents, and pregnancy rates in communities of color. Young people who live in extreme poverty with parents who have low levels of education have higher rates of pregnancy than youths who live in better socioeconomic conditions.⁸

UNINTENDED PREGNANCY

- Among teenagers, 85 percent of pregnancies are unintended, accounting for 25 percent of all unintentional pregnancies annually.⁹
- Among teens 15 to 17 years old, 46 percent of those with incomes below the poverty level are at risk of unintended pregnancy, compared with about one third of teens with family incomes 2.5 times the poverty level or above.¹⁰

BIRTH RATES

- In October 1996, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released data showing an 8 percent drop in the teen birth rate from 1991 to 1995.¹¹
- The birthrate for teenagers 15 to 19 years old per 1,000 was 56.8 in 1995. This rate declined steadily from its recent high in 1991 (62.1) and earlier high in 1970 (68.3).¹²
- In 1995, the birthrate for teenagers 15 to 17 years old declined 4 percent, while the rate for teenagers 18 to 19 years old declined 3 percent.¹³
- Birthrates for second births for teenagers declined in 1995 by 4 to 9 percent.¹⁴
- In 1994, the teen birthrate dropped slightly among African-Americans, stayed the same among Caucasian teens, and rose slightly for Latinas. The birthrate for Latina and African-American teens is 108 per thousand females 15 to 19 years old compared to 40 births per thousand for Caucasian females 15 to 19 years old.¹⁵

ABORTION

- The abortion rate, which remained in the low forties per 1,000 females 15 to 19 years old throughout the 1980s, also declined in the early 1990s, from 40 abortions per 1,000 females 15 to 19 years old in 1990, to 38 in 1991 and 36 in 1992.¹⁶
- 35 percent of all pregnancies among women 19 years old and younger end in abortion.¹⁷
- Teenagers who have abortions most often cite their young age and low income as the reason why they decide to end their pregnancies.¹⁸
- 11 percent of abortions are obtained after 12 weeks of pregnancy; these later abortions are disproportionately obtained by adolescents. Among young women under 15 years old, 22 percent of all abortions are done in the second trimester compared to 9 percent to women over 20 years old.¹⁹

PREGNANCY RISKS AND OUTCOMES

- 94 percent of teens believe that if they were involved in a pregnancy they would stay in school; in actuality, 70 percent eventually complete high school.²⁰

- 51 percent of teens believe that if they were involved in a pregnancy they would marry the mother/father; in actuality, 81 percent of teenage births are to unmarried teens.²¹
- 26 percent of teens believe that they would need welfare to support a child; in actuality, 56 percent receive public assistance to cover the cost of delivery and 25 percent receive public assistance by their early twenties.²²
- 32 percent of teens say they would consider an abortion; in actuality, 50 percent of pregnancies to unmarried teens end in abortion.²³

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